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## Confession and compilation: The seven deadly sins in Huntington Library, MS HM 114

Much of the recent interest in Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (sigil Ht) has been prompted by the value of the manuscript, as a production of the fifteenth-century London booktrade, to students of the scribal culture of that period.<sup>1</sup> Less frequently has the text of *Piers Plowman* the manuscript contains received any detailed critical reading as a distinct form of Langland's poem. Yet such investigations of HM 114's text of *Piers Plowman* as have been made have suggested that the manuscript repays close reading as a non-authorial version of the poem more complex and interesting than customary descriptions of it as an 'ABC splice' might imply. These studies have illustrated how the Ht redactor's handling of materials drawn from the three versions of Langland's poem displays, at times, particular preferences and resistances that imply a unique fifteenth-century response to *Piers Plowman*. John Thorne's analysis of Ht's version of passus 3 points to the redactor's selective use of the materials available in his exemplars in that part of the poem and argues for a 'tendency to suppress references to corruption in local administration'. More recently, Patricia Bart has studied some of Ht's unique lines and readings to argue for the scribe's 'active Latinity' and 'social and religious sensitivity'.<sup>2</sup>

I here evaluate further evidence for the Ht redactor's independent handling and reading of Langland's poem in his presentation of the confessions of the seven deadly sins in the second vision.<sup>3</sup> This part of the poem offers a useful testing ground for Ht's treatment of materials from all three versions of *Piers Plowman* since it is a sequence that Langland revised extensively in both the B and C texts, expanding the confessions with new lines in B and in C streamlining the existing matter whilst also incorporating much of the material from the description of Haukin's 'cote of cristendom' in B.13.273–459. An examination of Ht's treatment of Langland's passages

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<sup>1</sup> See most recently Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes in the City*, pp. 17–37.

<sup>2</sup> See Thorne, 'Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3', p. 72; Bart, 'The Ht Scribe', p. 225, p. 232. Elsewhere I have discussed the Ht redactor's use, in the ploughing scene of passus 6, of interpolations shared with the 'Ilchester' manuscript, arguing that the use to which this interpolated material is put points to an 'enthusiastic but independent' reader of *Piers Plowman* whose deliberate 'misplacement' of C-text material in his text of B works against the direction of Langland's own revisions in his final version; see Wood, 'Non-authorial *Piers*'. The manuscript also receives brief recent notice in Karrie Fuller's essay on another redactor, the 'Z maker'. Fuller contrasts the Z maker's introduction of a 'foreign voice' into the poem through his expansions, omissions, and unique readings with the Ht redactor who 'borrows Langland's own material to alter the poetic character of his new version'. See Fuller, 'The Craft of the "Z Maker"', p. 38. The most recent study of the text of *Piers Plowman* in relation to the other texts in HM 114 is published in the previous volume of this journal, but unfortunately appeared too late for me to take explicit account of it here: see Phillips, 'Compilational Reading'. See also Hanna, 'The Scribe of Huntington HM 114'.

<sup>3</sup> I have preferred the term 'redactor' to scribe since it cannot be assumed, although it can be argued, that the scribe who copied HM 114's text of *Piers Plowman* was also responsible for the acts of compilation that it reflects. Cf. Bart, 'The Ht Scribe', p. 220, cautioning that '[o]ne must never assume that the scribe, his work, and the planning of the manuscript are one and the same'.

of anticlerical satire in this section of the poem affords an opportunity to explore further evidence for what Bart has recently called the redactor's 'social and religious sensitivity'. I also seek, however, to move the discussion beyond the redactor's possible ideological commitments to consider some of the aesthetic properties of his text as well. While HM 114 has often been discussed as one of the most eccentric of all the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts and was rejected by Kane and Donaldson when editing the B text, I will argue that the redactor's activity in the second vision shows an apparent preference for those very poetic features of the B version that have also appealed most to Langland's post-medieval readers: its dramatic presentation of the sins in dialogue with Repentance and its expansive passages of pictorial detail emphasising the very human character of the sins as fully embodied actors in little scenes of social life. Correspondingly, we find in the redactor's selective adoption of materials from his various exemplars an apparent resistance to revisions in C that diminish such features in favour of the development of more abstract themes like the necessity of making restitution.

The characteristic emphases and evasions of Ht's conflated text of the confessions thus complicate the description of HM 114 as an 'ABC splice': as I will suggest, the text of *Piers* in the manuscript might better be described as a sort of 'B+', deploying C-text materials but in such a way as to enhance and expand rather than alter the distinct literary characteristics of B. The redactor's activities also make, then, for an interesting comparison with Langland's own processes of revision. Poet and redactor apparently have different priorities in incorporating new material, but we will notice that at times both author and redactor are apparently careless of the aesthetic properties of their texts, with tell-tale traces of repetition at sites of interpolation. Indeed, while the redactor occasionally makes an embarrassing mess of his text, the greater priority that Langland gives to thematic development in C means that the poet is sometimes rather less fastidious than the redactor about the dramatic and literary integrity of the sequence.

### **Accumulating sin: Ht's textual sources and compiling methods**

In the subsequent sections of this essay, I consider the evidence for the redactor's 'social and religious sensitivity' in the satirical passages of the confessions and explore his related interest in the dramatic and pictorial aspects of the confessions as scenes from contemporary social life. First, however, I offer an overview of the redactor's textual sources and some of his salient characteristics as a compiler. I begin here because one cannot simply assume that the unique arrangement of *Piers Plowman* lines in the manuscript necessarily reflects a particular ideological or aesthetic purpose. Some of the properties of the Ht text may result from more mundane aspects of the redactor's compiling methods. As I will show in this section, the redactor's

compulsion to collect *Piers Plowman* lines sometimes overwhelms even basic literary sense, although it also produces a repetitive quality to his text that is itself not wholly unLanglandian.

As described by George Russell and Venetia Nathan in their foundational study of the manuscript, HM 114 is ‘basically a B text...which contains...substantial borrowings from both the A and C texts of the poem, more or less adroitly woven into the basic B text to produce a new, edited version’.<sup>4</sup> In producing what I am calling a ‘B+’ version of *Piers*, the Ht redactor confers a particular authority on B as his ‘base text’ supplying the structure of the passus divisions and the sequence of the sins, both organising features that Langland adjusted in C.<sup>5</sup> The Ht redactor rejected all C’s structural changes, evidently viewing the sequence of the sins and division of passus in his B-text exemplar as authoritative, even as he appears simultaneously to have aimed at incorporating as much material as possible from C’s expansions, including materials from B 13 that Langland moved to the second vision and that the scribe would later copy again in their original location in the fourth vision of B.<sup>6</sup>

The material Ht borrows from C begins with a substantial insertion preceding the scribe’s copy of B passus 5, all but the final lines of the so-called ‘autobiographical’ passage (C.5.1–103); this large interpolation from the start of C passus 5 is followed by numerous further insertions from C.<sup>7</sup> The redactor generally worked with larger blocks of lines, although there are at least two instances in which he apparently adopts a single lection from the C text into what

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<sup>4</sup> Russell and Nathan, ‘A *Piers Plowman* Manuscript’, p. 121. Russell and Nathan’s account was published prior to the Athlone editions of B and C; in the absence of full collations for those versions, they are occasionally led to overstate the presence of A- and C-text material in Ht. Readings that they believed to have been imported from A or C now sometimes look more likely to have been derived from Ht’s B-text base, a source less reliable than Skeat’s base text L. Ht’s exemplar of B was apparently related to the subgroup YOC<sup>2</sup>CB of the beta family. For Ht’s textual affiliations, see *The C Version*, ed. Russell and Kane, p. 193 and n. 7; Bart, ‘The Ht Scribe’, p. 228, n. 20. Line numbers and quotations from *Piers Plowman* in this essay are unless otherwise stated from the Athlone edition. Where line numbers are given for lines unique to Ht, these follow the line numbering given in Bart’s Appendices (‘The Ht Scribe’, pp. 240–43), which is that of her forthcoming edition of Ht for the *Piers Plowman* Electronic Archive.

<sup>5</sup> In C, Repentance’s sermon and the confessions of the sins in passus 6 are separated from the dreamer’s apology and Reason’s sermon in passus 5. The concluding confession of Sloth, expanded with further materials taken from B 13, begins a further new passus in Langland’s final version. The material Langland imported from B 13 perhaps also influenced his decision to adjust the sequence of the sins when he made his final revisions: in C, the sequence begins Pride—Envy—Wrath—Lechery, whereas in B 5 Lechery follows Pride. In B 13 lechery likewise follows envy and wrath, although the two are not carefully distinguished there.

<sup>6</sup> For the redactor’s sense that B offered an ‘authoritative’ text, cf. Thorne, ‘Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3’, p. 72, where he argues that the redactor treats A and B as if they were ‘of equal or competing authority’, whereas the C text is recognised as a source of new material ‘but not at the expense of B’s authority’.

<sup>7</sup> These are listed (according to Skeat’s line numbering for the B and C versions) by Russell and Nathan, ‘A *Piers Plowman* Manuscript’, p. 123. One of the lines Russell and Nathan propose as a C-text insertion now looks less certain to have come from C. Russell and Nathan suggest that Ht inserts after line 317 (=Kane and Donaldson B.5.309) C.6.364 (according to Russell and Kane’s numbering) or A.5.160; they here seem to mean that Ht substitutes the C- or A-text line for the B version. In fact, MGC<sup>2</sup>F of B also share Ht’s variant reading ‘Tomme’, so this line should perhaps be viewed as derived from B. On the other hand, where Russell and Nathan proposed either an A- or a C-text insertion at Kane and Donaldson B.5.345, C seems to be more clearly the source. Only P<sup>2</sup>M of C here share Ht’s variant ‘stowpe’ (C.6.403) for the majority B-text reading ‘steppe’.

otherwise appears to be a line from the B manuscript tradition.<sup>8</sup> There is, incidentally, no evidence that the Ht redactor worked, in making these interpolations, with anything other than a C-text manuscript or manuscripts that witnessed the same original source as all other surviving copies. This point must be lingered over momentarily because some scholars have claimed that the Ht redactor had access to materials that had their origins in loose sheets of authorial draft composed prior to the received C text. Wendy Scase was the first to argue that interpolations from C passus 9 and C Prologue in passus 6 of Ht that share a unique textual form with the same lines inserted into an A-text Prologue in London, University Library, MS S. L. V. 88 (sigil J, the ‘Ilchester’ manuscript) reflect authorial draft materials, subsequently revised and incorporated into the received C text. Ralph Hanna has demonstrated, however, that the form of the interpolations in HtJ descends by the usual processes of scribal corruption from the common ancestor of all other manuscripts of the C version.<sup>9</sup> In the earlier portion of the poem that concerns us here, Russell and Kane report that ‘most variation from the adopted C text is with the X family or across families’.<sup>10</sup> Such a situation requires several generations of copying to account for the division into the two large families *x* and *p*, the generation of sub-groups, and the unique errors of the individual manuscript. There is no question, then, of Ht having preserved traces of distinct authorial drafts. The sources of his C-text insertions rather reflect—sometimes quite distantly—the same putative authorial original that modern critical editions have attempted to reconstruct and from which all the other surviving manuscripts descend.

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<sup>8</sup> In B.5.313, Ht has apparently combined the wording of the B-text line, ‘a doʒeyne oþere’, and its C-text equivalent, ‘a dosoyne harlotes’ (C.6.369), to give ‘a dosein oþer harlotes’. In a second instance of cross-versional comparison at the level of individual readings, Ht presents at B.5.421, ‘In catoun ne in decretales y can not rede a lyne’, where in the other B manuscripts the line reads ‘Ac in Canoun nor in decretals I kan noȝt rede a lyne’. C here revises to ‘Ac y can nat construe catoun ne clergialiche reden’ (C.7.34). Perhaps the Ht redactor used his C-text exemplar here to supply a reading that in his B copy he found illegible or otherwise unintelligible, although the substitution of Cato for canon law is one that might well have been made independently (and manuscripts PEVAQSKG of C read ‘canon’ with B against the other C-text witnesses). For other instances in which the Ht redactor may have ‘proofed’ lines of one version against an exemplar of another version, see Bart, ‘The Ht Scribe’, p. 228, n. 20.

<sup>9</sup> The argument for the authorial status of the HtJ materials has occasionally been revived since, including by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Andrew Galloway. The most recent treatment, however, by Vance Smith, reaffirms the scribal quality of the HtJ interpolations. Smith argues that these reflect not loose sheets of authorial draft but a selection from Langland’s new C-text lines that deliberately excludes some of the author’s own more humane statements on the theme of poverty. See Scase, ‘Two Piers Plowman C-Text Interpolations’; Hanna, ‘On the Versions of Piers Plowman’; Kerby-Fulton, ‘Langland “in his Working Clothes?”’; Galloway, ‘Uncharacterizable Entities’; Smith, ‘The Shadow of the Book’. I review the textual evidence at greater length in a forthcoming essay on the interpolations in passus 6 of Ht; see Wood, ‘Non-authorial *Piers*’.

<sup>10</sup> *The C Version*, ed. by Russell and Kane, p. 193, n. 7. From passus 10 onwards, Ht’s textual affiliations differ, suggesting either a change of exemplar or use of a copy that had changed affiliations at some earlier stage in its history. The interpolations in Ht from C passus 10 onwards are, like those in passus 6 shared with the Ilchester manuscript, far removed from any authorial original. As Robert Adams and Thorlac Turville-Petre have recently discussed, Ht’s interpolations from C passus 10 onwards share with National Library of Wales, MS 733B (N<sup>2</sup>) a markedly corrupt exemplar; in both copies ‘whole lines are rewritten in virtually identical form with the result that only dim recollections remain of the originals’. See Adams and Turville-Petre, ‘The London Book Trade’, p. 225.

By contrast with the extensive C-text interpolations, borrowing from the A text in passus 5 is minimal or non-existent. One of the two ‘certain’ A-text borrowings cited by Russell and Nathan looks now, with the benefit of a full collation of B, most likely to have derived from Ht’s usual B-text exemplar (Ht’s reading ‘he’ for B ‘we’ at B.5.533 is shared by GYOC<sup>2</sup>CB of B). The other ‘certain’ A-text borrowing cited by Russell and Nathan, from A.6.4 as found in VHEKL at B.5.516, remains possible, although the variant common to Ht and VHEKL is also found in F of B, a manuscript with which Ht shares a number of other readings.<sup>11</sup>

The redactor’s compulsion to collect *Piers Plowman* lines, which we will witness repeatedly in this part of the discussion, largely accounts for the relative absence of A-text material in this section of Ht’s text. A presents by far the least extensive account of the confessions of the sins, at just over two hundred lines (B doubles the length of the passage). The expansiveness that characterises Langland’s B-text revisions, which present further circumstantial details of sin and extended descriptions of the bodily attributes of the personified sins (see, for instance, B.5.135–36, 192–94, 351–58, and 385, discussed further below), means that A here offered the ‘textually acquisitive’ Ht redactor little that was not already available in his B-text exemplar.<sup>12</sup>

The ‘textually acquisitive’ nature of the redactor’s activities emerges again in his use of one further source in this sequence of the poem: lines imported from Haukin’s ‘confession’ in the fourth vision. A major part of Langland’s own revision in C involved just the same move, frontloading the material from the description of Haukin’s coat (B.13.273–459) into the second vision. The Ht redactor follows Langland’s own procedures for revision in incorporating into his text of B three blocks of material from this same source.<sup>13</sup> The redactor’s use of this material clearly illustrates his intimate knowledge of *Piers Plowman* in all its versions, for he apparently knew where to locate an alternative version of the material he would have found in his C-text exemplar.

The desire simply to include as many lines as possible perhaps again in part explains the redactor’s decision to incorporate this material from a distant locale in his B-text exemplar rather than simply copy it in the form he found it in his exemplar of C. The decision was not a particularly obvious or inevitable one to make, since using the material from B 13 meant adjusting, as Langland had also done, the third-person presentation of B to the first person of

<sup>11</sup> Although F’s reading here may itself derive from A; for the A text as one of the sources F conflates, see Adams, ‘Editing *Piers Plowman* B’, p. 51. For F’s agreements with Ht, see Bart, ‘The Ht Scribe’, p. 228, n. 20. Other possible A-text influence occurs at B.5.450, where Ht shares an omission with A.5.222 as in ChVHEAWMH<sup>3</sup>; B.5.460, where Ht shares with VHLE of A the insertion of ‘seint’ (A.5.232); and B.5.532, where Ht shares two variants with RHM of A (A.6.20). See Russell and Nathan, ‘A *Piers Plowman* Manuscript’, pp. 123–24.

<sup>12</sup> I adopt the description from Thorne, ‘Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3’, p. 73. Thorne notes there that A passus 3 likewise offered the Ht redactor a ‘meagre resource’ for supplementary material.

<sup>13</sup> B.13.321–25, 327–40 (inserted into Envy’s confession after B.5.100); B.13.356–74, 379–98 (inserted into Coveitise’s confession after B.5.198); and B.13.409–19 (inserted into Sloth’s confession after B.5.447).

C.<sup>14</sup> The material in B 13 offered however, in places, a fuller version of what was available to the redactor in the C text, for in incorporating the material from Haukin's 'confession' into the second vision, Langland did not always make use of all the possible relevant lines. Whereas the Ht redactor inserted into Envy's confession twenty lines from B 13, Langland himself incorporated only seventeen.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, when revising Coveitise's confession in the C text, Langland inserted only twenty-eight lines from B 13, whereas the Ht redactor incorporated thirty-nine into his text.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, in the case of Pride the Ht redactor inserted, rather than the equivalent material from B 13, the block C 6.12–62.<sup>17</sup> Here it is perhaps relevant that Ht's exemplar of B lacked, like all manuscripts of the beta family, seven lines of the description of pride in B 13.<sup>18</sup> The redactor's decision to interpolate C.6.12–62, rather than locating and importing the corresponding material in his copy of B 13, was perhaps motivated by the fact that his C-text exemplar in this instance offered the fullest version of the lines on pride available to him. On the other hand, the simple desire to incorporate as many relevant lines as possible into the confessions cannot alone explain the redactor's choice to mine Haukin's confession in B 13 in addition to his C-text exemplar, for in the case of the final confession of Sloth, as I discuss further below, he selected only eleven lines from a block of fifty-two that Langland had incorporated into the C text virtually entire and unaltered. It is possible that in his use of materials from B 13 here we again witness the redactor's general sense that his B-text manuscript was in some way the 'authoritative' or 'definitive' version, with the C text supplying additional material not found in that source.

The redactor's general desire to include as many *Piers Plowman* lines as possible is evident not only in the use of lines from C and B 13, but also in his rejection of Langland's own occasionally ruthless streamlining in the C-text version of the confessions. The redactor characteristically includes *both* the B and C versions of the same passages, again suggesting the

<sup>14</sup> Haukin's 'confession' in B 13 is only intermittently voiced in the first person (B.13.307–10, 315–17, 328–41, 362–98α); in general, Langland opens Haukin's sins to visual, not aural, scrutiny by figuring them as stains on his coat inspected by Conscience and Patience. The Ht redactor apparently revised his versions of B.13.323, 325, 327, 356, 357, 360, and 361 to supply the first person pronoun. Indeed, if we attribute all the variation in these lines to his hand, the Ht redactor maintained this preference when he copied the Haukin materials for a second time in their original place in the fourth vision of B. Here the Ht redactor retained the first person pronoun when he copied B.13.323, 325, 327, 356, 357, 360, 361 for a second time, as well as employing it in several further lines not previously incorporated into the second vision, B.13.344, 347, 350, 351, and 353. However, not all of Ht's variation here is certainly the work of the Ht redactor, but could have been already present in his exemplar: manuscript F shares with Ht the use of the first person in B.13.344, 345, and 350.

<sup>15</sup> Ht inserts B.13.321–40, accidentally omitting 326 on account of its resemblance to the previous line; Langland incorporated B.13.324–41 (=C.6.69–75, 77–85), omitting lines 331–32.

<sup>16</sup> Langland inserted B.13.360–98α, omitting 368–69, 375–82, 389–90 (=C.6.258, 260–85α). Ht includes B.13.356–74, 379–98. Ht's omission of B.13.375–78 looks to have been accidental, the result of eyeskip: line 379 begins 'And whoso', also the first two words of line 375 in manuscripts WHmCrYOC<sup>2</sup>CBLMR.

<sup>17</sup> These lines include material that Langland had imported, with some omission and revision, from B.13.277–312α (=C 6.30–60α).

<sup>18</sup> B.13.292–98.

status of his version as a kind of ‘super B’.<sup>19</sup> This habit also gives a somewhat repetitive quality to his text, as may be seen by comparing, for example, Langland’s and Ht’s handling of the materials concerning Envy. In the C text, Langland cut most of the vivid description of Envy’s appearance and sins in B.5.75–120, replacing it with a few introductory lines followed by an insertion from B 13.<sup>20</sup> Since both the original description of Envy’s crimes in B.5.86–120 and the materials imported from B 13 are predominantly concerned with the sin of backbiting, Langland evidently judged that the inclusion of the original material from B 5 alongside the new interpolation taken from the later part of the poem would be superfluous. Not so the Ht redactor, who included both sets of ‘backbiting’ material.<sup>21</sup>

The same drive to accumulate can be seen again when, after copying the lines on ‘backbiting’ from B 13, the Ht redactor returned to his B-text exemplar, copying the remainder of Envy’s account of his sins (B.5.101–33) before splicing together both the B and C versions of Envy’s resolve to amend himself (C.6.100–02, B.5.134). This sequence of copying again suggests a desire to include as much C-text material as possible, even at the expense of a certain degree of repetitiveness. In C, Langland had revised Envy’s brief resolve to amend in B.5.134 into a fuller, three-line concluding prayer (C 6.100–02). Ht, by contrast, copies both the three new C-text lines *and* the single line from B that they elaborate, despite the fact that the final C-text line he copied only minimally alters the equivalent line from B that immediately follows it in the manuscript (‘Graunte me, gode lord, grace of amendement’ (C.6.102) vs ‘I wole amende þis if I may þoruȝ myȝt of god almyȝty’ (B.5.134)).

The general effect of Ht’s compiling activities in this sequence involving Envy is undeniably, then, somewhat repetitive, especially in the duplicated references to sins of the tongue (B.5.86–89 closely followed by B.13.321–24 on folio 26<sup>v</sup>). But the accumulation of material from both B and C in Ht’s version of Envy’s confession perhaps suggests a desire not only to have as comprehensive a confession as possible, but also to preserve some of the material describing Envy’s physical appearance, including his bloated body (B.5.83), that Langland had cut in C. As I will discuss below, this attention to bodily detail is a feature of B that the redactor sought to enhance in one of his unique additional lines.

There is, perhaps, also a certain thematic aptness, if by accident rather than by design, to this desire to accumulate lines. Confession itself requires that the penitent compile an exhaustive list of his sins. And it is not just in Ht but also in each of Langland’s own successive versions

<sup>19</sup> Thorne observes that in passus 3 the redactor used the C text ‘mainly to augment B, usually at parallel points, with no loss of B’ (Thorne, ‘Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3’, p. 72).

<sup>20</sup> C 6.69–85=B.13.324–41, omitting B.13.331–32.

<sup>21</sup> After copying B.5.75–100, the Ht redactor interpolated, as already noted, B.13.321–40, omitting line 326.



that we see the catalogue of sins become increasingly massive, reflecting perhaps the paradox inherent in the confessions themselves: the act of compiling and rehearsing one's sins serves merely to reaffirm the compulsive and addictive repetitiveness of sin itself.

The repetitive quality of Ht's compilation of *Piers Plowman* lines from different versions of the same material is not, then, a feature wholly foreign to the poem itself. Indeed, as I discuss further below, not only Ht's text but also Langland's own contains instances in which interpolated materials leave tell-tale traces of repetition, with both unrevised and revised versions of the same line appearing in close succession. Russell and Kane cite the example of Piers's first appearance in the C text (C.7.185–93), and Andrew Galloway has discussed further instances, characterising such repetitions as 'a tic of the poet wherever he made revisions in any version'.<sup>22</sup>

If the repetition produced by his acts of compilation is not wholly unLanglandian, however, it must be acknowledged that the Ht redactor's compulsion to collect sometimes produces results that are simply inept. One might take, for example, the case of Purnele proud-herte. Langland's own interpolation here of an expanded confession (C.6.12–62) produces a slightly awkward effect, for as Derek Pearsall notes, the arrangement of materials means that Purnele promises amendment *before* confessing her sins—unless the voice that speaks in lines 16–60α is imagined to be a second personification, Pride.<sup>23</sup> Ht's use of the same insertion in his B-text base (after B.5.70) causes a much more serious additional rupture, however, for the final line of the confession refers to the next personification to appear, in C's new arrangement of the sins Envy ('Quod repentaunce riht with þat; and thenne aroos enuye', C.6.62). In the context into which it is imported in Ht, this line is nonsensical because the next personification to appear, when the Ht redactor returns to his B-text base after copying the block of lines on pride from C, is Lechour (B.5.71). Here a rather crude impulse towards the inclusion of as much as possible of the available textual material seems to override attentiveness to basic sense and continuity. The ineptness of the interpolation here is the more striking given how little editing the substitution of the appropriate name in the b-verse would have involved.

On the other hand, the Ht redactor's inclusion of this C-text line, even at the expense of logic, suggests that he was strongly motivated to incorporate those additional lines in the C version in which Repentance cajoles and directs the personified sins. Elsewhere, as I will show below, Ht's version offers a unique disposition of C-text material that preserves, against the direction of some of Langland's own revisions in C, the dramatic framework provided by

<sup>22</sup> *The C Version*, ed. by Russell and Kane, p. 85; Galloway, 'Uncharacterizable Entities', pp. 75–77. Russell and Kane take the presence of revised and unrevised versions of the same lines as evidence of uncompleted revision.

<sup>23</sup> *The C-text*, ed. by Pearsall, n. on C.6.6 (p. 121).

Repentance's dialogue with the sins.<sup>24</sup> And as we will see, at times Langland's own interpolations in C prove more disruptive of the existing dramatic framework of B than the redactor's interventions.

So far this survey of the redactor's work suggests that while we may witness a preference for preserving and incorporating certain types of material, such as the bodily descriptions that Langland cut in C and the dramatic framework involving the confessor Repentance, not infrequently the mere compulsion to collect overrides or obscures any particular ethical or aesthetic agenda. The redactor's labour appears often, that is, to have been mechanical rather than intelligent. In his apparent enthusiasm for Langland's poetry, the Ht redactor seems at times compelled to accumulate material at the expense of even the most elementary literary cohesion.

The same mechanical quality to the redactor's acts of compilation can also be seen in his treatment of Latin lines, the final aspect of his work that I will consider in this preliminary overview. Not only does the redactor display a tendency to accumulate additional individual Latin lines where available, as both Thorne and Bart have noted,<sup>25</sup> but he appears also at times to have used the Latin lines as a way of tracking the larger blocks of parallel passages with which he typically worked, rather than reading the passages through carefully line by line.<sup>26</sup> This process seems to have resulted in some mechanical slips, where additional material that the redactor might otherwise have included was apparently overlooked. For instance, towards the end of Repentance's prayer that concludes the sequence of confessions, Ht inserts, after B.5.505, a group of lines with which Langland had expanded the petition in C:

And sethen oure sauyour and seydest with thy tonge  
 That what tyme we synnefole men wolden be sory  
 For dedes that we han don ylle dampned sholde we ben neuere  
 Yf we knowlechede and cryde Crist þerfore mercy:  
*Quandocumque ingemuerit peccator omnes iniquitates eius non recordabor amplius*  
 (C.7.144–47α)

<sup>24</sup> One might also point out that in contrast to the clumsy transition from Pride's confession, in the following confession of Lechour the redactor manages a neat dovetailing of B and C materials. Here, after B.5.71–74, Ht inserts the passage C.6.171–95, but omits from this section two lines already copied in their B-text form (C.6.173–74; cf. B.5.73–74). On similar inconsistencies in the Ht compiler's performance in passus 3—at times adeptly weaving together materials, at others seeming to be 'unresponsive' to the repetition produced by some of his interpolations—see Thorne, 'Updating *Piers Plowman* passus 3', p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Thorne, 'Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3', p. 73; Bart, 'The Ht Scribe', pp. 221–25.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Adams was the first to suggest that *Piers Plowman* scribes might have used the poem's Latin quotations as a means of facilitating ready comparison between parallel passages in exemplars of different versions, pointing out that in the course of inserting Latin lines not present in B, the Ht redactor seems also to have noticed and introduced into his copy small-scale variation in the English lines, as in the case of his replacement of the b-verse of B.3.100 with that of A.3.89. See Adams, 'Editing *Piers Plowman* B', pp. 57–58.

The redactor neglected to incorporate, however, a further new C-text line that follows the Latin: ‘And for that muchel mercy and marie loue thi moder’ (C.7.148).<sup>27</sup> While this line is to a degree repetitive of the b-verse of B.5.503, a line that Ht had already copied, the readiest explanation for its omission seems to be that the redactor used the Latin lines to assist his parallel reading of two exemplars, leading to his simply overlooking the single new line that followed the new Latin quotation in C.7.147α.

Some of the redactor’s failure to incorporate lines available in his exemplars, then, may be accidental rather than motivated, just as the redactor is not invariably selective in his incorporation of additional lines or even attentive to their basic continuity with their surround. Thus one should not over-emphasise the redactor’s adroitness as a compiler—and occasionally composer—of Langlandian lines. At times the compulsion to collect overrides the intelligence witnessed in the redactor’s more adept interventions into the text. At times, too, the unique features of Ht’s text are perhaps better explained by the mechanics of his methods of compilation—such as the habit of tracking parallel passages via the Latin lines—than by any particular ‘editorial agenda’.

Nevertheless, certain preferences may be observed in the redactor’s compilation. As I will argue at greater length below, the combination of Ht’s unique lines together with his apparently selective incorporation and placement of some of the additional materials he takes from C and from B 13 implies a general preference for the literary qualities most characteristic of his base text B. The redactor seemed to prefer B’s dramatic and fully embodied presentation of the sins as ‘characters’ in dialogue with Repentance, as opposed to the emphasis that Langland himself placed in his C-text revisions on thematic development. Before exploring in more detail the poetic character of Ht’s ‘B+’ text in comparison with Langland’s own B and C versions, however, I will first consider what evidence this part of the poem might offer to support the recent contention that the redactor displays a ‘social and religious sensitivity’. As this overview of Ht’s text has indicated, such evidence must be assessed cautiously, because it is not always easy to distinguish between those aspects of the redactor’s text that might display particular social or literary sensibilities and those that reflect more mechanical aspects of the reproduction of lines compiled from multiple exemplars.

### **Social and religious satire in Ht**

In a recent essay on Ht, Bart describes as one of the characteristics of the redactor a ‘social and religious sensitivity’ that is evident in his unique version of B.10.331, part of Clergy’s ‘prophecy’

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<sup>27</sup> The next line in C, C.7.149, is unrevised B.5.504.

about the ‘Abbot of Abyngdoun and al his issue’. In Ht, this line becomes ‘an abbot of Englonð & an abbess & her issue’. According to Bart, Ht’s version is ‘at once more careful and more scurrilous than the original reading, indicating a greater anger toward members of religious orders, and yet...also indicating a greater desire to be circumspect’.<sup>28</sup> We can observe evidence of similar tendencies, I argue in this section, in the passages of anticlerical satire within the confessions of Wrath and Coveitise. Ht’s text of Wrath’s confession includes a unique line that indicates his attention to the poem’s anticlerical satire and an apparent desire to expand it to encompass the monastic orders, who are spared the brunt of Langland’s own critique. At the same time, the redactor’s failure to include, from the confession of Coveitise, one of the C text’s more stunning warnings to the clergy might imply the kind of ‘circumspection’ relating to anticlerical satire that Bart has observed elsewhere. As I will argue, however, it is not easy, either in this instance from Coveitise’s confession or in Bart’s example from passus 10, to tell whether Ht’s text reflects a purposeful adjustment of Langland’s satire or a more mechanical reflex of his compilational methods.

Ht’s version of Wrath’s confession and its satirical passages displays some of the same tendency towards accumulation of as many lines as possible that we have already seen in the previous section of this essay. When Langland himself came to revise this confession in the C text, he reworked the passage describing Wrath’s role in the disputes between friars and secular clergy (B.5.137–52; cf. C.6.118–27). At the same time, he both inserted new material expanding the portrait of the sin (C.6.105–17), and cut the lines celebrating Gregory IX’s foresight in not allowing women confessors (B.5.166–68) in favour of an extended depiction of the nuns’ unsisterly viciousness and a more broadly antifeminist passage on wrath among wives and widows (C.6.139–50). Rather than select from the alternative versions of the anticlerical and antifeminist satire offered by his B- and C-text exemplars, the Ht redactor chose, characteristically, to include both. However, the redactor here went beyond that *mere* compulsion to collect that we have seen elsewhere, displaying, apparently, an alertness to the anticlerical content of this sequence and expanding the reach of Langland’s satire with a unique line adding satirical targets of his own.

Ht first presents the opening of Wrath’s confession as found in B, including the passage in which Wrath explains how he has stirred up anger between mendicants and secular clergy (B.5.137–52). Langland suggests in these lines how the friars, in luring parishioners away from making their confessions to the secular clergy, claimed the very temporal power they were supposed to have renounced by their espousal of poverty: they ‘parte’ with ‘possessioners’ by

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<sup>28</sup> Bart, ‘The Ht Scribe’, p. 233.

diverting to themselves revenues for performing spiritual services that were customarily the property of the parish clergy (B.5.144–45). Simultaneously, the secular clergy ‘parte’ with friars the ‘spiritualite’ (B.5.149–50) of wrath, as each side in the dispute disparages the other in their sermons (rights to preach being another area of contention in the contemporary controversies between mendicants and secular clergy). Following this passage of broad anticlerical satire against both secular clergy and friars, the Ht redactor incorporated the new opening to the confession that Langland had supplied in C (C.6.105–18), followed by a unique line (here highlighted in bold) and unique versions of C’s revised lines on the dispute between friars and parish priests:

**Monkes & monyals & meny manere peple<sup>29</sup>**

Prestes & parsons prelates of holy cherche

In here wones in þis world moost lyvþ wrappe

Beggars & such broþelis are atte debate ofte

I wrathe wex an hye and walke with hem all (fol. 28<sup>r</sup>; cf. C.6.119, 21, 123–24)

Here Ht offers more than simply a conflation of B- and C-text versions of Langland’s satire, for the C-text lines are here copied with a number of unique variants, as may be seen by comparing Ht’s lines with the received C text:

Freres folewen my fore fele tyme and ofte

And preuen inparfit prelates of holy churche;

And prelates pleyneth on hem for they here parschiens shryuen

Withoute license and leue, and herby lyueth wrathe.

Thus thei speke and dispute þat vchon dispiseth oþer.

Thus Beggares and Barones at debat aren ofte

Til y, wrathe, wexe an hey and walke with hem bothe (C.6.118–24)

One cannot be absolutely certain that all the variation from the original in Ht’s version of these lines can be attributed to the same intelligence responsible for combining the B and C text passages, as some might derive from the C-text exemplar the redactor used. This page of HM 114 nevertheless offers (since no surviving C-text manuscript shares Ht’s variants) a unique version of Langland’s satire.

Admittedly, the unique variants in the C-text lines do not necessarily, in themselves, suggest any particular ‘sensitivity’ to Langland’s satire. Ht’s version of these lines from C loses Langland’s pointed suggestion that the secular clergy are like secular lords or ‘Barones’,

<sup>29</sup> The a-verse of this line, numbered Ht 5.390 in Bart’s Appendix 1, apparently derives from B.20.264/C.22.264, ‘Monkes and Monials and alle men of Religion’, or else from C.18.74, ‘As monkes and monyals, men of holy churche’. The b-verse resembles in a general way such lines as ‘Masonis, mynours, & many oþere craftis’ (A.Prol.101/B.Prol. 222) and ‘Munde þe myllere, & manye mo oþere’ (A.2.76/B.2.112/C.2.116). See also the discussion below of further Ht-unique lines created by splicing together authorial and scribal verses.

illegitimately claiming temporal power like the friars also do.<sup>30</sup> Ht substitutes a more general pejorative term ('such broþelis') for Langland's allusion to abuse of temporal power.<sup>31</sup> Langland's specific satirical suggestion (in C.6.119–21) that the friars disparage the secular clergy while they in turn accuse the friars of hearing confessions without 'leave' is likewise lost in Ht, where C.6.120 is dropped altogether (perhaps because both it and line 119 began with the same sequence 'And pre-'). Instead, Ht presents a straightforward list of those among whom wrath can be found. These variants one might readily dismiss of being of little intrinsic interest: characteristic of scribal activity, they slacken the author's satire based, as Wendy Scase has shown, on a carefully-chosen and pointed vocabulary.

The unique interpolated line 'Monkes & monyals & meny manere peple' is of greater potential interest, however, as evidence for the redactor's sensitivity to Langland's satire, because it is a more clearly motivated intervention into the text and, as such, apparently indicates an interest in *Piers Plowman's* treatment of the monastic orders. As we have seen, Langland had made friars and secular clergy equally the targets of his satire in Wrath's confession, but he spared monks much of this critique: in B 5.169–81, Wrath says that he finds little support among monks because of their discipline. Of course, this statement might well be taken to be ironic, but at the same time, as Pearsall notes, Langland does apparently draw a contrast between the discipline of the monks and the infighting of the nuns, a contrast intensified with the addition of C.6.139–42 on squabbling sisters.<sup>32</sup> The Ht redactor, by contrast, apparently rejects or ignores such a distinction. In HM 114 *all* the material on nuns is incorporated, including both the new lines on the scrapping sisters and the passage on Gregory's foresight in B.5.166–68 that Langland dropped in C. Ht thus offers a complete set, as it were, of Langland's lines against nuns, whilst also inserting the additional line on wrath among 'Monkes & monyals' that indicates a certain resistance to Langland's own apparent exclusion of monks from the satire of this part of the poem. The Ht redactor was, perhaps, familiar with the conventional associations of wrath with monks and supplied an additional line assimilating Langland's poem more definitively to that conventional model.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> As Wendy Scase shows, the use here of the vocabulary of secular lordship ('Barones') to refer to the secular clergy implies 'misused institutional power' and illustrates how Langland developed out of the dispute between mendicants and seculars a broad anticlerical satire that attacks the misuse of temporal wealth and power by both the friars and the secular clergy. See Scase, *New Anticlericalism*, pp. 17–22.

<sup>31</sup> MED, s.v. brothel, n., '(a) A worthless person, vile creature; rascal, scoundrel; (b) fig. a vice or sin; (c) used attrib.: vile, worthless'.

<sup>32</sup> *The C-text*, ed. by Pearsall, note on C.6.155 (p. 127). Pearsall refers to Langland's 'marked respect' for the monastic orders throughout the poem.

<sup>33</sup> For the 'association of monks with envy and quarrelsomeness', see Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, p. 225, n. 62.

The treatment of anticlerical material in Wrath's confession perhaps suggests, then, the same 'social and religious sensitivity' that Bart finds in Ht's unique readings in B.10.331. Ht's dilution in passus 5 of Langland's specific anticlerical vocabulary whilst simultaneously expanding his satire against the monastic orders displays a similar combination of traits to those Bart observes in B.10.331, which similarly presents a more comprehensive satirical attack on the religious orders (both nuns and monks) but, simultaneously, a less specific satirical vocabulary.

We may detect a similar 'social and religious sensitivity' and a similar 'circumspection' in handling Langland's social and religious satire in the confession of Coveitise. Here the redactor incorporated two new passages of anticlerical satire that Langland had added in the C text, but he did so only selectively. The redactor's omission of one particularly sharp passage of anticlerical exhortation may indicate his 'circumspection', although as we will see, the interpretation of such an omission is more difficult than the interpretation of an additional line such as the one on 'Monkes & monyals' just discussed.

The two new C-text passages in question concern the theme of restitution, which, as I will discuss further below, Langland emphasised in many of his C-text revisions. The first is Langland's reworking and expansion of the lines in B in which Repentance imagines himself as a friar who—unlike real contemporary representatives of the fraternal orders—would refuse to accept ill-gotten gains. Here Repentance insists that he cannot offer Coveitise absolution until he has made restitution (B.5.265–73 $\alpha$ , C.6.287–95). In a second expansion, Repentance explains that a whore may more readily pay the tithe 'of here ers wynnyng' than the usurer may tithe from his immoral earnings. Moreover, a priest who accepts miswinnings will share or 'parte' with the sinner not only the profit of his crime but also his punishment in purgatory:

3e! þe prest þat thy tythe taketh, trowe y non other,  
 Shal parte with the in purgatorye and helpe paye thy dette  
 Yf he wiste thow were such when he resseyued thyn offrynge.  
 And what lede leueth þat y lye look in þe sauter glose,  
 On *Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti*.  
 There shal he wite witturly what vsure is to mene  
 And what penaunce the prest shal haue þat proud is of his tithes.  
 For an hore of here ers wynnyng may hardiloker tythe  
 Then an errant vsurer, haue god my treuthe,  
 And arste shal come to heuene, by hym þat me made! (C.6.298–307)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> C.6.301–02 are taken over from B (=B.5.276, 277 $\alpha$ ).

Confronted with this provocative additional material in his C-text exemplar, the Ht redactor included C's expansion of the passage in which Repentance imagines himself as a friar, as well as the additional lines on the whore's ability to tithe.<sup>35</sup> Ht omits, however, the lines quoted above on how the priest who receives 'miswinnings' will share the usurer's punishment in purgatory (C.6.298–300). It is possible that the redactor found the anticlerical import of these lines just a little too vigorous for his taste. In that case we would witness here another example of the redactor's 'circumspection' in handling some of Langland's anticlerical material observed by Bart in relation to his unique version of B.10.331.

On the other hand, Ht's omission of this block of lines may have less to do with their fierce anticlerical content than with the redactor's methods of compilation. The passage that the Ht redactor did include, inserted after the Latin line B.5.277α (*Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti?*) and a spurious line that appeared in the B-text archetype, comprises only those lines that follow the corresponding Latin line in the C version (C.6.302). It may be that he here compared his B and C exemplars by tracking their corresponding Latin lines, thus simply overlooking the block of new C-text lines that preceded the Latin line shared with B (C.6.298–301). I have already noted above that the same procedure of tracking Latin lines may explain the redactor's omission of C.7.148 in Repentance's concluding prayer. This possibility should perhaps caution the reader of HM 114 against attributing *all* the variation in the manuscript to any single 'editorial agenda'; at times more mechanical features of the process of compiling materials from multiple witnesses may be responsible for the unique disposition of *Piers Plowman* lines in Ht.

The same caveat also applies, indeed, to Bart's example of HM 114's version of the 'Abbot of Abingdon' prophecy to which I referred at the beginning of this section. Here one should note that Ht's unique version is created by splicing together the B and C versions of the same line: B.10.331, 'And þanne shal þe Abbot of Abyngdoun and al his issue for euere' + C.5.176, 'For þe abbot of engelonde and the abbesse his nese' = Ht 10.446, 'þan shal an abbot of Englund & an abbesse & her issue for euere'. We might ponder then—and no conclusive answer seems possible—how far Ht's version witnesses a pointed recalibration of Langland's anticlerical satire, and to what extent it reflects a more straightforward desire to compile all the alternative readings offered by his different exemplars.

## Scenes from social life: the Ht redactor and the poetic character of *Piers Plowman* B and C

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<sup>35</sup> C.6.303–07, inserted in Ht after B 5.277α and a spurious line from the B-text archetype.



If the unique line on ‘Monkes & monyals’ that I have discussed in the preceding section attests to the redactor’s sensitivity to Langland’s social satire, other unique lines in this part of the poem, together with the particular choices the redactor made about incorporating materials from C and from B 13, imply a related interest in the social scene depicted in the confessions. While generally seeking, as we have already seen, to include as much additional material as possible, the Ht redactor apparently seeks also to preserve and even to enhance, against the direction of Langland’s own revisions in C, the dramatic presentation of the confessions as dialogues between Repentance and the sins as fully embodied, pissing and farting, ‘characters’. Before we can see how the redactor worked selectively with the additional materials available to him to emphasise these features of his B-text base, however, we must first notice how Langland himself revised the confessions in C to prioritise the themes of restitution and the poet’s vocation over the dramatized dialogue that characterises B, a development that the redactor apparently resisted. I focus here on the confessions of Coveitise and Sloth, the two sins whose confessions Langland revised most significantly in his final version of the poem.

In their B-text form, these two confessions are characteristic of Langland’s presentation of the sins in that version. In B, Langland had expanded the confessions with further circumstantial instances of sin and provided more extensive descriptions of the characters’ bodily attributes, including Coveitise’s quivering cheeks and Sloth’s slimy eyes (B.5.192–94, 385–91). At the same time, as John Alford has shown, Langland had developed in B the fully dramatic presentation of the sins by expanding the role of Repentance. Whereas in A Repentance offers just two lines of advice to Envy (A.5.103–04), in B he examines and cajoles the sins, eliciting the confessions and bringing the whole sequence to a close with his concluding prayer (B.5.477–509).<sup>36</sup> The lines in which Repentance questions and counsels Coveitise extensively, stressing both the availability of God’s mercy and the necessity of making restitution, are entirely new to B (B.5.230–95). Similarly, Repentance has an expanded role in Sloth’s confession, first urging him to wake and confess (B.5.392) and then prompting him again (B.5.441). As Alford argues, by means of such expansions to Repentance’s role Langland transforms, in B, ‘a sequence of monologues...into something genuinely dramatic’.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, in the C text Langland tends to develop the themes of the two confessions at the expense of the dramatic presentation of ‘characters’ confessing.<sup>38</sup> As noted above, C expands upon the passage in B’s confession of Coveitise in which Repentance imagines himself

<sup>36</sup> Alford, ‘The Figure of Repentance’, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Alford, ‘The Figure of Repentance’, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> For extended analysis of the revisions to the confessions of Coveitise and Sloth in the C text, see Hanna, ‘Robert the Ruyflare and His Companions’.

as a friar and adds to it the further sequence explaining that the priest who receives the tithes of a usurer will also share or ‘parte’ with him his punishment in purgatory. These additional lines develop more extensively than B the thematic emphasis on ill-gotten gains and the necessity of restitution.<sup>39</sup> Whilst expanding this thematic strand, Langland cuts down some of the passages of dramatic dialogue between Repentance and the sins, abbreviating the sequence in which Repentance engages in unproductive dialogue with Coveitise by cutting two of the questions and answers altogether (B.5.254–59) as well as one of Langland’s best jokes, in which Coveitise expresses his belief that ‘restitution’ means the same as ‘riflynge’ through the possessions of people ‘at rest’ because he knows only the French of Norfolk (B.5.235–36). Also cut in C are Coveitise’s resolution to amend and the dramatic presentation of his suicidal despair, prompting Repentance’s final speech on the availability of God’s mercy (B.5.226–29, 279–95). In place of the latter, Langland advances from the end of Sloth’s confession in B his resolution to ‘yelde ayein’ (B.5.455–60)—in C reworked and reassigned to a new character, Ȝeuan-Ȝelde-aȜein (C.6.308–14)—followed by the prayer for mercy of Robert the Robber (B.5.461–76=C.6.315–30).

As Ralph Hanna shows, with their emphasis on the theme of the restitution of ill-gotten gains, the insertions of Ȝeuan and Robert are both thematically consistent with the other expansions on friars and priests as recipients of ill-gotten gains and appropriate to the sin of avarice. Yet they equally disrupt that fully dramatic presentation that Alford identified as the defining characteristic of the B version.<sup>40</sup> Langland’s effort to redirect the speech by Repentance that follows the appearance of Robert back to the original confessing sin, ‘the vsurer’ Coveitise (C.6.339), seems markedly clumsy and suggests that here thematic development took priority over dramatic coherence. The insertion of material from Haukin’s ‘confession’ in B 13 similarly disrupts the dramatic *dialogue* between Repentance and the confessing sin.<sup>41</sup> As Hanna notes, ‘This rather truncated version of materials from B 13 fails utterly to address what Repentance has just said—that the sin must surrender his ill-got goods’.<sup>42</sup> Dramatic dialogue, such a notable feature of the B version, here gives way again to monologue.

Langland also prioritises themes over drama in Sloth’s confession. Just as the intrusion of Ȝeuan-Ȝelde-aȜein and Robert fragments the single voice of Coveitise confessing, so too Sloth’s dramatic voice dissolves in C. In place of Sloth’s resolution to make restitution in B.5.455–60—

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<sup>39</sup> On restitution as the central theme of Langland’s revisions in this part of the poem, see Hanna, ‘Robert the Ruyflare and His Companions’, p. 92. Pearsall points out that Repentance ‘is given a significantly greater role in C, in accord with the increased emphasis throughout C on penance and restitution’ (*The C-Text*, ed. by Pearsall, n. on C 6.1 (p. 121)).

<sup>40</sup> Hanna, ‘Robert the Ruyflare and His Companions’, p. 81, p. 91.

<sup>41</sup> B.13.360–98α with some omissions=C.6.258–85α.

<sup>42</sup> Hanna, ‘Robert the Ruyflare and His Companions’, p. 92.

which, as already noted, is removed to Coveitise's confession and reassigned to 3euan in C—Langland inserts, from B 13, a discussion of the 'branches of sloth' that segues into the passage on 'God's minstrels'.<sup>43</sup> This insertion is thematically apt in its new position in C, for in putting forward an alternative form of 'minstrelsy' in which the rich will be 'entertained' by, *inter alia*, the improving discourse of a 'lered man' (C.7.104), the passage on God's minstrels both takes up the dreamer's earlier self-presentation in his own 'confession' as itinerant learned man (C.5.35–52) and, more immediately, offers a corrective to the emphasis in Sloth's confession on 'ydele tales' (C.7.19), those stories of Robin Hood that Sloth knows better than his paternoster (C.7.19, 10–12).<sup>44</sup> But the dramatic situation of the sin Sloth confessing here dissolves as the poem slips into the first-person voice of the dreamer/narrator (C.7.85, 98, 101). This voice addresses not any character within the dramatic scene but an imagined audience outside the text, '3e lordes and ladies and legatus of holy churche' and '3e riche' (C.7.81, 101). The subsequent transition to an expanded version of Repentance's concluding prayer from B is, like Repentance's closing address to 'the vsurer' Coveitise, a somewhat awkward effort at reviving the dramatic scene of the previous version of the poem.<sup>45</sup>

When confronted with these interpolations in the C version that offer more extensive thematic development but at the expense of the dramatic presentation characteristic of B, the Ht redactor worked selectively to incorporate much of the additional material offered by C whilst minimising its impact on the existing dramatic framework provided by his B-text exemplar. The redactor indeed incorporated rather more material from B 13 into the confession of Coveitise than Langland himself had done.<sup>46</sup> However, he inserted this material as the opening of Coveitise's confession, rather than in the later position chosen by Langland, where it follows Repentance's first reference to the necessity of making restitution.<sup>47</sup> The Ht redactor's alternative placement of the interpolation from B 13 allows it to form part of a single confession with the existing B-text material that follows (B.5.199–269β).<sup>48</sup> The Ht redactor thus avoided the (deliberate) breakdown of dialogue between the sin and Repentance that occurs at the point of insertion in the C text. He also rejected C's interpolation of the 3euan/Robert materials, which prove similarly disruptive to the dramatic framework of B.

<sup>43</sup> B.13.409–56=C.7.69–116, with three additional concluding lines, C.7.117–18α.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hanna, 'Will's Work', esp. p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> C.7.144–48 are lines new to the C version.

<sup>46</sup> See note 16. Ht copies B.13.356–74, 79–98 where Langland had included a somewhat abbreviated version, B.13.360–98α, omitting 368–69, 375–82, 389–90.

<sup>47</sup> The Ht redactor inserts the material from B 13 after B.5.198, the opening line of the confession in that version of *Piers Plowman*. In Langland's C text the material follows on from C.6.257α (=B.5.273).

<sup>48</sup> Ht inserts two further C-text lines into this block from B: C.6.247 after B.5.246, and C.6.252 after B.5.247.

In Sloth's confession, the Ht redactor was again selective both in the extent of the material adopted from C and in its placement within his copy of B. As I have shown, Langland inserted most of a large block of material—some fifty-two lines—on the branches of sloth and 'God's minstrels' from B 13, placing this material at the end of Sloth's confession instead of the lines in B in which he resolved to make restitution. The Ht redactor selected only a short passage of this same material.<sup>49</sup> The eleven lines the Ht redactor inserted, B.13.409–19, form a self-contained section discussing the 'branches of sloth'. This truncated portion of the materials that Langland had interpolated at the end of Sloth's concluding prayer the Ht redactor inserted at an earlier point, concluding the speech in which Repentance exhorts Sloth to express sorrow for his sins.<sup>50</sup> By cutting off the materials taken from B 13 just before the intrusion of the narrator's direct address to the rich at B.13.421, and by placing them at the end of Repentance's speech, the Ht redactor avoids the dissolution of the dramatic scenario produced by Langland's own interpolations. Inserted in this position, the short passage from B 13 functions in Ht as a kind of mini sermon, voiced by Repentance, on the 'branches of sloth', allowing Sloth's appropriately contrite response to follow (B.5.448–60). The redactor's alternative placement of his selection from this material thus reinforces, rather than dilutes, the effect of a dramatic dialogue between the confessing sin and the 'priest' Repentance.<sup>51</sup>

Ht's expansion of Repentance's speech through the 'misplacement' of the materials from B 13 in Sloth's confession is consistent with other decisions he made that also enhance the role of Repentance and therefore the dramatic dialogue within the confession sequence. I have already noted earlier in this essay how the Ht redactor incorporates into Pride's confession a new line spoken by Repentance in the C text (C.6.61–62), despite the awkwardness created by the reference in these lines to Envy rather than Lechour as the next sin to confess. One of Ht's unique lines also offers an expansion, against the direction of Langland's own revisions, of Repentance's role in the confessions as a sequence of dramatic dialogues. The unique line appears at the conclusion of the confession of Wrath, the closing lines of which Langland had revised in the C text. In his final version of the poem, Langland replaced the first person pronouns found in the B-text version of these lines ('assoiled me after / And bad me wilne to

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<sup>49</sup> It should be pointed out that Ht's B-text exemplar lacked, like all beta manuscripts, B.13.436–53. However, that would not have precluded the redactor making a somewhat larger selection from B.13 or from the equivalent material in his exemplar of C. Indeed, when he copied B 13, he made good the deficiency in his B exemplar by inserting C.7.96–118.

<sup>50</sup> Langland inserted the material from B 13 following C.7.68 (=B 5.454); the Ht redactor incorporated his own shorter selection after B.5.447.

<sup>51</sup> Though the effect is interesting, the redactor's placement of the new lines need not have required any great literary imagination, for it may have been guided by the existing verse paragraphs in his B-text exemplar. The interpolation precedes B.5.448, a line which is marked with a paraph in Ht and perhaps also in his exemplar, indicating the transition from Repentance's speech to Sloth's action in sitting up and making his vow to amend in future.

wepe my wikkednesse to amende’) with the third person (‘assoiled hym aftur / And bad hym bid to god be his helpe to amende’).<sup>52</sup> The poet thus removed in his final version the sudden direct personal involvement of the narrator; perhaps ultimately he decided he preferred to smooth over this disruption to the personification allegory of B. The Ht redactor, however, not only retained the first person pronouns of B and thus the dreamer’s presence at this point in the poem, but also added a final unique line further expanding it: ‘And so shold y savyd be if y wold synne no more’ (Ht.5.442, fol. 29<sup>v</sup>). The redactor thus reverses here the direction of Langland’s own revision in C by consolidating and further expanding at the end of Wrath’s confession the presence both of the dreamer and of Repentance as the orchestrator of the dramatic scene.

The redactor’s apparent interest in preserving and even expanding upon the dramatic and social situation of the confessions may also finally be seen in Ht’s handling of the confession of Glutton, already the most ‘dramatic’ of all the confessions—indeed in the A text Glutton’s ‘confession’ is almost entirely dramatic interlude, concluded with a brief resolution to abstain in future (A.5.210–12); only in B does Langland add a confession as such (B.5.367–77). As with the confessions of Coveitise and Sloth, in his final version Langland revised Glutton’s concluding confession so that the dialogue with Repentance in B reverts to monologue in C.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, whereas Langland’s revisions to the confessions of Coveitise and Sloth in the C version tend to prioritise thematic development over dramatic presentation, in C Langland added to Glutton’s confession two extra lines which expand, as B had also done, the catalogue of Glutton’s lowlife companions.<sup>54</sup>

In selecting from C’s materials, the Ht redactor ignored the changes to the dramatic dialogue between Repentance and Glutton, but expanded further upon Langland’s own additions to the dramatic interlude in the pub with a sequence of lines, two of which are entirely unique, the others padding out dissected versions of the two new C-text lines with additional, unique material (all of the unique material here represented in bold):

**A cacchepolis knave** þe hangman of tyborne (C.6.368 b-verse with unique a-verse)

**A tumbler a tregetour** a pilid tothedrawer (C.6.370 b-verse with unique a-verse)

**Gongfermers an hepe and meny such gromes** (for the a-verse, cf.

C.6.374/B.5.317/A.5.166?)

Of portours of pikepurs **taberers and tylers** (C.6.370 a-verse + unique b-verse)

An hayward an hermyte **& meny oper harlotes** (C.6.368 a-verse + unique b-verse; cf.

C.6.369?)

**Mynstrels and Millers & meny mo meselles**

<sup>52</sup> B.5.186–87, C.6.168–69. In all three versions, Repentance’s sermon begins by inciting ‘wille to wepe water wip hise eizen’ (B.5.61; cf. A.5.44, C.6.2), but as Míceál Vaughan points out, we may perhaps see the use of ‘wille’ here as ‘something less than a fully personified allegorical character’ and different from those moments at which the dreamer-narrator speaks about himself in the first person. See *The A Version*, ed. by Vaughan, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> See B.5.364–84, C.6.422–41.

<sup>54</sup> C.6.368 and 370; cf. B 5.312, 316, lines new to B.

(Ht.5.636–41, fols 31<sup>v</sup>–32<sup>r</sup>)<sup>55</sup>

The interest the Ht redactor here took in the dramatic interlude involving Glutton, one of Langland's most memorable scenes of social life, is confirmed by a final unique line he interpolated into the confessions of the deadly sins, inflating Langland's description of Glutton's fart: 'For sauour þat þei felyd of his foundement flowyn' (Ht.5.667 on fol. 32<sup>r</sup>, following B.5.343). The additional line perhaps somewhat belabours Langland's own depiction of the response of Glutton's companions to his attack of wind, but it underscores the redactor's apparent enthusiasm for the very bodily humanity of the sins, a feature of B's expansions that Langland's revisions in C tend to diminish. As I have already noted, the B text had added such features as Coveitise's roughly-shaven beard and quivering elderly cheeks (B.5.192–94) and Sloth's slimy eyes (B.5.385), as well as Wrath's white eyes and runny nose (B.5.135–36) and Glutton's vomit (B.5.351–58). In C, however, Langland reduced the quantity of such material again, cutting most of the description of Envy in B.5.77–85. The Ht redactor, as we have already seen, preserved this material from B's account of Envy alongside the material from B 13 with which Langland had replaced it in C. Apparently guided by the same interest in the passages of bodily description and imitating, perhaps, the expansive tendency in B that saw Langland add to Glutton's fart his spewing up, the redactor also adds his unique line Ht.5.667, further filling out the sordid human detail of Glutton's dramatic interlude.

Taken together, the unique lines that we have been examining in the previous few paragraphs eke out passages of dramatic dialogue involving Repentance (Ht.5.442), of dramatic interlude and scenes from social life (Ht.5.636–41), and of gross bodily description (Ht.5.667). Conversely, the additional passages that Ht fails to incorporate from his exemplars of C and B 13 are those that, characteristically of Langland's apparent priorities in his final version, disrupt the dramatic situation in favour of more extended development of themes like restitution and the poet's vocation. Thus both the redactor's unique lines and the selections he makes from the additional material available in his exemplars show, in general, a preference for those features that are most particular to Ht's 'base-text', the B version. One might therefore, as I have been suggesting, properly call Ht's text not an 'ABC splice' but rather a kind of 'B plus', a version of the text that imports C-text materials but so as to retain or enhance the dramatic and characterological qualities that predominantly distinguish the B rather than the A or C versions.

In displaying such preferences in creating his 'B+' version of *Piers Plowman*, we might well call the Ht redactor the first modern reader of this sequence, for it is for their apparent verisimilitude that the confessions have generally captivated modern readers. Such a mode of

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<sup>55</sup> See Bart's account of these unique lines, 'The Ht Scribe', p. 242. They are inserted after B.5.317.

interpretation was enshrined in Skeat's notes to his edition of the poem, the foundation of modern study; indeed, so compelling a portrait of contemporary city life did the sequence seem to offer that Skeat reports that he had once entertained the hope of identifying the very pub in which Glutton enjoyed his misadventures.<sup>56</sup> Editors in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have perhaps been more circumspect in their pursuit of Glutton to his favoured watering hole, but Pearsall's notes to his edition of C often follow Skeat in assuming that the sequence offers evidence of social life in fourteenth-century London (see, for instance, his note on pews in C.6.144, drawing on Skeat). Perhaps it is not surprising that the version of *Piers Plowman* in HM 114 should coincide in this interest with modern readers: Skeat had noted numerous parallels between the poem and the *Liber Albus* on such matters as ale measures, usurious contracts, peony seeds, the pillory, and street-sweepers,<sup>57</sup> and one may imagine that the Ht scribe, at least, if not the same person as the redactor, might have noticed many of these parallels too. His hand also appears in the *Liber Albus*, book II and he may have been its compiler under the direction of John Carpenter.<sup>58</sup>

Yet if the Ht redactor appears to share with the modern reader an enthusiasm for the social scene of the seven deadly sins, nevertheless this remains a reading that must overlook or resist Langland's own final intentions for the confessional sequence in the C version, in which the poet apparently found some of the liveliest 'human interest' of the scene redundant. Dramatic realism is a feature of the confessions largely unique to the B version and to the Ht redactor's augmented B text; in C as we have seen, the sins are often not talking to Repentance at all, while the voice of the narrator speaks over the 'characters' to the poem's thematic concerns and its hypothetical reader. In their continued emphasis on the historical-social concerns of the passage, the readers of the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, as much as the Ht redactor, may largely have resisted the implications of Langland's final revisions.

### Compilation and composition: the poet and the Ht redactor

If HM 114 presents a unique non-authorial version of *Piers Plowman* that anticipates some of the (mis)apprehensions modern readers have had about Langland's work, nevertheless I conclude by returning to some of the perhaps surprising similarities between the activities of the redactor and the poet that emerge from a comparison of their handling of the confession sequence. I have

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<sup>56</sup> See his note on his C.7.360: 'At one time I supposed that the "Boar's Head," in Eastcheap, immortalized by Shakespeare, might have been the very tavern here meant; but the Boar's Head is not mentioned as being a tavern till 1537, and the localities mentioned point rather to Cheapside [...] Moreover, William lived at one time in *Cornhill*, which is close by'. *Piers the Plowman*, ed. by Skeat, II, 90.

<sup>57</sup> See Skeat's notes on his C.7.231, II, 84; C.7.233, II, 84; C.7.249, II, 86; C.7.359, II, 90; C.7.366, II, 90; C.7.371, II, 91.

<sup>58</sup> For this suggestion, see Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, p. 21.

already observed in the first part of this essay how the duplications of material created by some of the redactor's interpolations (such as the splicing together of two versions of the same lines concluding Envy's confession) resemble in a general way the repetitions at points of insertion of new material that Galloway has called a 'tic' of the poet himself while revising. One might also emphasise that in this sequence of the poem at least, the redactor goes beyond merely comparing the parallel passages in his B and C exemplars, instead replicating the poet's own activity in C by seeking out the further materials on the sins in the description of Haukin's coat and, apparently, editing them to fit the new first-person context of the second vision.

Conversely, in incorporating the material from B 13 into the confession sequence, Langland himself works often as a compiler of *Piers Plowman* lines. At times, the material from Haukin's confession is inserted into the second vision of C without alteration to its new context and with little apparent concern for strict literary consistency. For example, in transferring the material on pride from Haukin to the confession of Purnele proude-herte, Langland made, as Pearsall notes, no concession to the original gender of the speaker, incorporating without change material more suited to a male character.<sup>59</sup> And as I have already discussed, the material on sloth/God's minstrels is intruded into C passus 7 without adaptation to the dramatic context.<sup>60</sup>

Langland, to be sure, does not blunder quite as the Ht redactor does in including C.6.62 referring to Envy rather than Lechery as the next sin to appear (although this is, after all, the poet who notoriously omitted Wrath altogether in the A text of *Piers Plowman*). Yet as Galloway discusses, Langland's own processes of revision not infrequently leave behind unharmonised blocks of material, a habit that renders problematic clear distinctions between scribal and authorial activity. Russell and Kane took the view, for instance, that the insertion in C.Prol.95–124 was misplaced in its present position by a person other than the poet. The subject of this interpolation, an attack on the keepers of shrines, does not fit well, they argue, the context into which it is here intruded, a discussion of higher clergy who abandon unglamorous pastoral work in favour of administrative service.<sup>61</sup> Yet as Galloway points out, Langland elsewhere acknowledges within the poem the intrusiveness of just such another digressive C-text interpolation at C.20.357: 'A litel y ouerleap for lesynges sake'.<sup>62</sup> In such a situation, the awkward fit or digressive quality of an interpolated passage clearly cannot be the sole factor in judging whether the insertion was made by author or scribe.

<sup>59</sup> *The C-text*, ed. by Pearsall, n. on 6.3 (p. 121).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. also Pearsall's note on the insertion, *The C-text*, ed. by Pearsall, n. on 7.69–118 (p. 143).

<sup>61</sup> *The C Version*, ed. by Russell and Kane, p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> This and the example of C.Prol.95–124 are discussed by Galloway, 'Uncharacterizable Entities', pp. 74–77.



If the poet's work occasionally has a 'scribal' quality as he reassembles and reconfigures his own earlier compositions, the Ht redactor, as we have already seen, is at times a composer as well as compiler of Langlandian lines. In Glutton's dramatic interlude especially, compilation and composition overlap as the Ht redactor inserts, as I discussed above, half-lines from C filled out with verses of, apparently, his own manufacture—verses that nevertheless resemble in a general way 'authentic' *Piers Plowman* half-lines. I here list the unique half-lines already quoted earlier alongside authorial verses they broadly resemble:

Ht-unique b-verses:	<i>Piers Plowman</i> b-verses:
and meny such gromes	& manye opere craftis (A.Prol.101/B.Prol. 222)
& meny oper harlotes	with a dosoyne harlotes (C.6.369; cf. A.5.163, B.5.313)
& meny mo meselles	& manye mo opere (A.2.76/B.2.112/C.2.116)

It might be objected that such verses would be better described as pastiche than as composition; on the other hand, Langland himself had begun his list of Glutton's companions with similarly generic or 'padding' b-verses:

Watte þe waffrer & his wyf bothe,

Tymme þe tynkere & tweyne of his knaues (A.5.159–60)

Indeed, it is the generic quality of Langland's original catalogue of scoundrels that made it potentially infinitely expansible: the poet himself first eked it out with two additional lines in B (5.312, 5.316) before expanding it with a further couple of lines in C (6.368, 370). This expandable quality of the original authorial lines seems to have invited the redactor's imitation of the poet with some further eking out of his own.

Assuming, however, that the individual responsible for the compilation of Langlandian lines in HM 114 is also the composer of the unique lines in the manuscript, I cannot rate him very highly as an alliterative poet. Of the ten unique lines in passus 5 (listed in Bart's Appendix 1 and 2), only two are unmetrical: Ht 5.442 and Ht 5.667. (And Ht 5.442, 'And so shold y savyd be if y wold synne no more', might be counted as metrical if one allows that its composer followed Langland's own practice of allowing two strong dips.)<sup>63</sup> Yet only half of the unique lines in passus 5 are regular in alliteration (Ht 5.390, Ht 5.442, Ht 5.637, Ht 5.640, and Ht 5.641). The apparent lack of concern for alliteration can be witnessed particularly clearly in those unique lines in the interlude involving Glutton that I have just discussed, where scribally-composed verses have been combined with Langlandian half-lines. In two of the four such lines the redactor combines his own half-lines with authorial verses in such a way as to create irregular alliterative patterns:

<sup>63</sup> For Langland's 'tendency to ignore [...] the requirement that one of the first two dips in the b-verse should be strong and that both cannot be', see Duggan, 'Notes on the Metre of *Piers Plowman*', p. 169, modifying some of the conclusions in his earlier 'Notes Toward a Theory'. I am grateful to Ralph Hanna for discussing these examples with me.

Ht 5.636 **A cacchepolis knave** þe hangman of tyborne

Ht 5.639 Of portours of pikepurs **taberers and tylers**

Thorne has previously suggested that Ht's text of *Piers Plowman* sometimes gives the impression that the redactor took the view that an alliterative line has 'three alliterative sounds in any configuration', and there is some evidence of this in lines such as Ht 5.667, 'For sauour þat þei felyd of his foundement flowyn'. In the two examples just quoted from the list of Glutton's companions, however, we find *aa/xx* and *aa/bb*, and the redactor seems quite often to have been satisfied with a mere two alliterative sounds in any combination.<sup>64</sup>

Of course, Langland himself is well known for having departed from the constraints governing alliterative patterning observed by other poets, most notably in the freedom he apparently felt in assigning alliteration to unstressed syllables (denoted 'mute staves' by Carl Schmidt).<sup>65</sup> Even more notorious is the passage in the C-text Prologue (lines 108–24) whose failure of normative alliteration many, including the Athlone editors, have judged as evidence of incomplete revision.<sup>66</sup> And as Hoyt N. Duggan has observed, this instance is but an extreme case of Langland's habitual practice: he points to 'the presence in all three versions of lines completely lacking alliteration'.<sup>67</sup> The poet of *Piers Plowman* as well as the Ht redactor, then, seems sometimes to have been careless about metrical form, and some of the Ht-unique lines that fail to conform to the alliterative patterns governing other poets might be 'rescued' as instances of patterns apparently authorial in *Piers Plowman*. Two of the unique lines in passus 5, for example, display the pattern *aa/xx*, not accepted by Kane and Donaldson or Schmidt as an authentic pattern but nevertheless, as Duggan points out, admitted into both their editions.<sup>68</sup>

Yet such efforts at defending Ht's unique lines quickly come to feel like special pleading. Even as he describes Langland's increasing freedom from the metrical constraints governing the other alliterative poets, Duggan reminds us that 'Metrical Rule III [governing the word classes that may receive alliteration] still characterizes the great majority of lines in the C text'.<sup>69</sup> Langland's idiosyncratic practices do not produce anything like the proportion of non-normative lines found in the Ht redactor's compositions. Ht's unique lines thus resemble much more closely—as one might of course predict—other scribal renditions of alliterative verse than they do Langland's own practice. We cannot be certain to what extent the failure of regular alliteration

<sup>64</sup> Thorne, 'Updating *Piers Plowman* Passus 3, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> See the summary of his theories on the metre of *Piers Plowman* in his Appendix to *A Critical Edition of the B-Text*, ed. by Schmidt, pp. 506–08.

<sup>66</sup> See *The C Version*, ed. by Russell and Kane, pp. 87–88. As already noted, Russell and Kane judged this passage to have been also misplaced in its present position by someone other than the poet.

<sup>67</sup> Duggan, 'Notes on the Metre of *Piers Plowman*', p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> Duggan, 'Notes on the Metre of *Piers Plowman*', p. 174. See Ht 5.415, 'And was profrid þe pax brede or y for to kysse' and 5.636, 'A cacchepolis knave þe hangman of tyborne'.

<sup>69</sup> Duggan, 'Notes on the Metre of *Piers Plowman*', p. 184.

in Ht's unique lines is to be attributed to the hand of the immediate scribe, since it cannot necessarily be assumed that they were necessarily of his own manufacture. Nevertheless the failure of alliteration in the Ht-unique lines as non-authorial confections may be compared with examples of similar inattention to alliteration in the Ht scribe's copying of *The Siege of Jerusalem* in Lambeth Palace Library, MS 491 (assigned the sigil D by the poem's editors).<sup>70</sup> In the following representative examples, the scribe has substituted a non-alliterating synonym for an alliterating word in his exemplar, which shared a common ancestor with Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm.v.14 (U) and British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, part 1 (C):

Nathan toward Nero nome on his way (l. 53)

nome on] toke þe D

Neþer merked ne made bot mene fram hem passyþ (l. 116)

mene] evyn D

A tabernacle in þe tour atyred was riche (l. 467)

atyred] tired UC, arayed D

Tempting though it may be to claim for the Ht redactor the status of a 'maker' of alliterative verse in the '*Piers Plowman* tradition', the similar failure of alliteration that characterises the majority of the lines unique to his copy of *Piers Plowman* suggests that such would be an excessively flattering description.<sup>71</sup>

I would not wish, then, to exaggerate the resemblances between the activities of author and redactor in this part of the poem. The Ht redactor ventures rarely into the realm of original composition, and as I have insisted throughout this essay, at many points his engagement with the texts of *Piers Plowman* is mechanical rather than inspired. Nevertheless, the inconsistencies in the redactor's performance—sometimes delicately splicing materials, at others seemingly careless of the aesthetic properties of the hybrid text he was creating—might offer suggestive parallels to the contradictions scholars have noted in Langland's own activities as a reviser and sometimes compiler of his own work—contradictions sometimes attributed to accidents of transmission or to the work of other hands, such as the figure Russell and Kane imagine to have compiled the C-text Prologue from Langland's papers after his death.

At the very least, the unique version of *Piers Plowman* in HM 114 is worthy of careful reading alongside the work of certain other scribes working with multiple versions of the poem, like the 'Z maker' and the scribe of Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (F), both also active

<sup>70</sup> *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. by Hanna and Lawton.

<sup>71</sup> On the metre of the poems of the *Piers Plowman* tradition, see Duggan, 'Notes on the Metre of *Piers Plowman*', p. 173, n. 38: '*Mum and the Sothsegger* and *Death and Liffe* were written to the metrical constraints that governed other poets, but the other poems in Helen Barr's edition of *The Piers Plowman Tradition* [...] are more difficult, if not entirely impossible, to address because of corrupt texts'.

compilers and occasional composers of Langlandian lines. We might not want to call the Ht redactor a poet or even an editor or critic. But he is an engaging (if not always himself one hundred per cent engaged) reader whose apparent enthusiasm for Langland's poetry, while it sometimes overrides good literary judgement, nevertheless inspires him not only to preserve many of the Langlandian passages most enjoyed by modern readers, but also to add to the expansive body of *Piers Plowman* lines some earthy matter of his own.

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#### **Abstract:**

This essay examines the unique version of the confessions of the seven deadly sins in Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (Ht). The Ht redactor apparently seeks to compile as many *Piers Plowman* lines as possible, whilst simultaneously preserving the dramatic and bodily presentation of the confessions that is most characteristic of his B-text base. The text of *Piers* in the manuscript might thus be described, this essay suggests, as a sort of 'B+' rather than an 'ABC

splice', incorporating C-text materials but in such a way as to enhance and expand rather than alter the distinct literary characteristics of B.

**Keywords:**

Huntington Library MS HM 114, Richard Osborn, manuscripts, scribes, compilation, revision, satire, seven deadly sins, confession, restitution.

**Abstract for the annual bibliography:**

This essay examines the unique version of the confessions of the seven deadly sins in the second vision of *Piers Plowman* in Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (Ht). The manuscript has often been discussed as one of the most eccentric copies of *Piers Plowman*, but the redactor's version of the second vision shows an apparent preference for those very poetic features of the B version that have also appealed most to Langland's post-medieval readers. The redactor seeks to compile as many *Piers Plowman* lines as possible, whilst simultaneously preserving the dramatic presentation of the confessions that is most characteristic of his B-text base. The characteristic emphases and evasions of Ht's conflated text of the confessions complicate the description of HM 114 as an 'ABC splice'. The text of *Piers* in the manuscript might better be described, this essay suggests, as a sort of 'B+', deploying C-text materials but in such a way as to enhance and expand rather than alter the distinct literary characteristics of B. The redactor's methods of compilation also present interesting comparisons with Langland's own methods of composition, with both authorial text and scribal redaction showing a tendency toward tell-tale traces of repetition at sites of interpolation.